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Statewide library initiative to strengthen rural communities, help unemployed

COOKEVILLE, Tenn., April, 8, 2010—Public libraries have always been important institutions in rural communities. As the Internet shrinks the world, and expands the marketplace they have become an even more important resource. In Tennessee, 80 percent of rural public libraries now provide the only free public access to the Internet in communities with some of the lowest rates of home Internet access.

As growing lines of unemployed and underemployed workers seek access to job searches, job applications and even training to help them find better jobs, the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development (ECD) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development (USDA) have teamed up with the Tennessee State Library and Archives (TSLA), a division of the Secretary of State, to solve a big part of the problem.

ECD Commissioner Matt Kisber and USDA Rural Development State Director Bobby Goode today launched an initiative to increase the capacity of rural libraries to provide workforce training and increase educational opportunities for the communities they serve. The announcement was made during the opening session of the Fifteenth Annual Rural Development Conference hosted by Tennessee Technological University.

According to Kisber at least 76 rural public libraries in 61 counties are eligible to apply for a grant to create or upgrade broadband enabled computer labs (see list below).

Kisber said grants will range from about \$13,000 to almost \$20,000 depending on the local need and availability of existing resources. Funding will pay for seven to 12 new computers, all necessary peripheral equipment and a high speed Internet router for each participating library.

Goode said, "The disproportionate economic hardship rural Tennesseans continue to endure as a result of the recession is no secret. Unfortunately, these same people are less likely to have access to the training and other resources available with high speed Internet at home."

"Public libraries are a natural place to bridge this gap," Goode said. "More adult workers turn to them every day; to search and apply for jobs online, access training to expand their skills, apply for assistance and seek answers to health, legal and other issues aggravated by unemployment."

"This partnership is one of the many ways Rural Development and ECD are working together to strengthen our rural Communities," said Kisber.

"Working together we have a unique opportunity to increase the ability of rural Tennesseans and our rural communities to compete in the 21st Century marketplace," agreed Goode.

Funding for the initiative includes \$1,030,000 from the state, \$350,000 from USDA and \$70,000 from TSLA.

The Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development ...

USDA Rural Development invests in jobs, businesses, community infrastructure, homeownership and affordable rental housing in rural communities. Last year in Tennessee Rural Development assisted more than 864,000 families and businesses with more than \$655 million in financial assistance through affordable loans, loan guarantees and grants.

For more information on this program contact the Rural Development State Office in Nashville at 615-783-1300, toll free at 1-800-342-3149, or locate the Rural Development Area Office that serves your county at www.rurdev.usda.gov/tn.

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ELIGIBLE LIBRARIES

Rural libraries are defined as those in incorporated cities with a population under 20,000 or in unincorporated communities in counties with a population under 50,000.

County	Location of Libraries
Benton	Camden
Bledsoe	Pikeville
Campbell	Jellico
Cannon	Woodbury
Carter	Elizabethton
Claiborne	Tazewell
Clay	Celina
Cocke	Newport
Cocke	Parrottsville
Crockett	Alamo
Cumberland	Crossville
Decatur	Decaturville
Decatur	Parsons

DeKalb	Alexandria
DeKalb	Smithville
Dyer	Dyersburg
Fentress	Jamestown
Gibson	Milan
Grainger	Bean Station
Greene	Greeneville
Greene	Mosheim
Grundy	Altamont
Grundy	Monteagle
Hancock	Sneedville
Hardeman	Bolivar
Hardin	Savannah
Hawkins	Church Hill
Hawkins	Mount Carmel
Hawkins	Rogersville
Haywood	Brownsville
Henderson	Lexington
Henry	Paris
Hickman	Centerville
Hickman	Lyles
Houston	Erin
Jackson	Gainesboro
Jefferson	Jefferson City
Johnson	Mountain City
Lake	Tiptonville
Lauderdale	Ripley
Lawrence	Lawrenceburg
Lewis	Hohenwald
Lincoln	Fayetteville
Macon	Lafayette
Macon	Red Boiling Springs
Marion	Jasper
McMinn	Athens

McNairy	Adamsville
McNairy	Selmer
Meigs	Decatur
Monroe	Sweetwater
Morgan	Coalfield
Morgan	Sunbright
Obion	Union City
Overton	Livingston
Perry	Linden
Perry	Lobelville
Pickett	Byrdstown
Polk	Ducktown
Putnam	Monterey
Rhea	Dayton
Roane	Kingston
Roane	Rockwood
Scott	Huntsville
Sequatchie	Dunlap
Stewart	Dover
Sullivan	Blountsville
Trousdale	Hartsville
Unicoi	Erwin
Union	Luttrell
Warren	McMinnville
Wayne	Clifton
Weakley	Dresden
Weakley	Greenfield
Weakley	Martin
White	Sparta